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'IT'S TERRIFYING': Police on hand as pandemic protesters picket hospitals



Canadian Press

Sep 13, 2021 • September 13, 2021 • 5 minute read • [282 Comments](#)

A protester carries a crucifix during an anti-vaccine mandate protest outside Toronto General Hospital in Toronto, Sept. 13, 2021.
PHOTO BY CHRIS HELGREN /REUTERS

Two police officers escorted Faye Doiron and Randy Longaphie as they left Toronto General Hospital on Monday, helping the pair make their way through a crowd of protesters denouncing pandemic measures.

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Doiron, who came to Toronto from Prince Edward Island to wait for a lung transplant, was leaving after a physiotherapy session at the hospital, with Longaphie, her cousin, pushing her wheelchair.

The crowd of largely unmasked demonstrators parted slowly but peacefully to let them through as one officer led the way and another walked behind them.

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“It’s terrifying,” Doiron said. “Doctors told me if I ever catch COVID, I won’t make it.”

Dozens of demonstrators attended the rally Monday, many of them condemning Ontario’s proof-of-vaccination system, which is scheduled to take effect next week. A larger demonstration also took place earlier Monday afternoon outside the Ontario legislature.

The event was one of several expected across Canada on Monday. An organization calling itself Canadian Frontline Nurses posted notices of “silent vigils” set to take place in multiple communities, which it said were meant to critique public health measures put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19.

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Planned locations included the Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre and the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax.



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Organizers said they wanted to take a stand against what they call “tyrannical measures and government overreach,” but added they were not encouraging nurses to walk out on their shifts or abandon patients.

In Montreal, demonstrators rallied at McGill University Hospital Centre’s Glen site, some of them carrying signs questioning the use of COVID-19 vaccines. Others bore signs opposing rules imposed on health-care workers.

Health-care workers in Quebec who are in contact with patients for more than 15 minutes at a time are required to be fully vaccinated by Oct. 15. The Health Department has said workers

who are not fully vaccinated by then will be reassigned, if possible, or suspended without pay.

Doug Ford 

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The protests we're seeing outside of hospitals are selfish, cowardly and reckless. Our health care workers have sacrificed so much to keep us all safe during this pandemic. They don't deserve this kind of treatment — not now, not ever. Leave our health care workers alone.

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Roughly two dozen protesters gathered on the sidewalk in front of the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax on Monday, many of them voicing concerns about the proof-of-vaccination system announced by health officials in that province last week, which takes effect Oct. 4.

Police officers wearing yellow vests controlled a crowd of protesters at Calgary's Foothills Medical Centre on Monday afternoon, ensuring patients and staff could enter the facility safely.

Dozens of people rallying against public health restrictions — notably vaccine passports — crowded one street corner. Some bore signs that read “medical vaccine medical tyranny” and “lockdowns are a crime against humanity,” while a group of counter-protesters held up a sign that read “we stand with AHS (Alberta Health Services).”

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Sparky Johnson, one of the protesters at the Queen’s Park event in Toronto, said she was a member of Take Action Canada, a group opposed to mandatory vaccination.

“This is my body and I get to choose what to put in it,” she said.

John Tory  · Sep 12, 2021

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Police have been very clear that if any ambulance is being blocked responding to an emergency, they will move people and make arrests for obstruction.

John Tory 

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I support police in taking whatever action is necessary to protect the lives of innocent people seeking medical care and all of our healthcare heroes.

We have long passed the time when we can have this tyranny of a few interfere with access to healthcare during a pandemic.

4:16 PM · Sep 12, 2021



390



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Toronto police said there were no reports of hospital staff or patients being blocked from accessing Toronto General Hospital as part of the demonstrations, and no disruptions to hospital services.

However, the University Health Network, which runs Toronto General Hospital, said such protests are disheartening for staff.

“To see protests in front of hospitals is demoralizing for all who work here but particularly for the staff who have cared for the people dying of COVID-19, often without all of their family and loved ones around them,” the hospital network said in a statement Monday.

That sentiment was echoed by some doctors who stood outside the hospital as the protest got underway.

Dr. Andrew Boozary, the executive director of social medicine at the University Health Network, said the event “feels like a moral gut punch” for those in a health-care system already grappling with burnout due to the pandemic.

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“I think we just have to remind ourselves this is a very small, vocal minority,” Boozary said.

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Some high-ranking Ontario politicians and prominent health-care organizations had issued warnings in anticipation of the events.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford described such events as “selfish, cowardly and reckless” in a tweet on Sunday.

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario and Ontario Medical Association issued a joint statement “strongly condemning” the planned disruptions and calling for designated safe zones around health-care facilities to protect staff and patients — a proposal the province’s New Democrats have also floated.

Toronto Mayor John Tory condemned the protests planned for some city hospitals, adding he had been in contact with the local police chief about the events and received assurances that

staff would be protected and patients could access the buildings.

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Outside Vancouver city hall, police estimated a crowd of about 400 gathered to protest against vaccinations and vaccine passports, which went into effect in B.C. on Monday. Some carried signs that read “My body, my choice.”

They later began marching downtown to British Columbia’s Supreme Court while police diverted traffic.

It was announced Monday that all health-care workers and volunteers in B.C. will soon have to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said hospitals are under strain from people who are unvaccinated.

“Sadly, the choice of not to get vaccinated is affecting our families and our communities across the province,” she said.

Police in Victoria said a man was arrested for assault during a protest at the B.C. legislature.

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They say while the protests in the city were centred at the legislature, a square adjacent to city hall and some media outlets, officers did provide routine patrols to Royal Jubilee Hospital and health-care facilities.

Victoria police say the man was arrested after a person was assaulted by being doused with a hot liquid. The alleged victim declined medical treatment, said police, who are continuing their investigation. No charges have been laid.

Some federal party leaders also addressed the planned demonstrations while out on the hustings.

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau vowed to bring in legislation that would make it a crime to obstruct access to any building providing health care, or to intimidate or threaten health-care workers carrying out their duties as well as any patient receiving that care.

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“It’s not right that the people tasked with keeping us safe and alive during this pandemic should be exposed to hatred, violence, fear and intimidation,” he said at an event in Vancouver.

Conservative Leader Erin O’Toole said peaceful protest is one thing, harassing people accessing and working in health care is another.

“This type of harassment and protest in front of hospitals is completely unacceptable,” he said during a campaign event in Ottawa.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said it is wrong to protest at hospitals.

“No health-care worker, no patient, no one seeking health care should in any way be limited or have a barrier to getting the care they need,” he said while campaigning in Sioux Lookout, Ont.

Past protests have centred on both public health measures and the prospect of proof-of-vaccination systems that would limit access to many public settings for those who have not been immunized against COVID-19.

Ontario’s system is set to launch on Sept. 22.

Quebec’s rolled out earlier this month, Manitoba began issuing vaccine cards in June, and both Nova Scotia and Yukon have said proof-of-vaccination systems are in the works.

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